



March 1, 2001

Mr. Joe A. De Los Santos
Walsh, Anderson, Brown, Schulze & Aldridge
P.O. Box 460606
San Antonio, Texas 78246-0606

OR2001-0770

Dear Mr. De Los Santos:

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID# 144564.

The Northside Independent School District (the "district"), which you represent, received a request for 14 categories of information relating to the district's proposed termination of a district employee. You inform us that some of the responsive information has been released to the requestor, but claim that the remaining responsive information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.026, 552.101, 552.114 and 552.131 of the Government Code. We have considered the exception you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

Section 552.114 excepts from disclosure student records at an educational institution funded completely or in part by state revenue. Section 552.026 provides as follows:

This chapter does not require the release of information contained in education records of an educational agency or institution, except in conformity with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974, Sec. 513, Pub. L. No. 93-380, 20 U.S.C. Sec. 1232g.

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974, ("FERPA"), provides that no federal funds will be made available under any applicable program to an educational agency or institution that releases personally identifiable information (other than directory information) contained in a student's education records to anyone but certain enumerated federal, state, and local officials and institutions, unless otherwise authorized by the student's

parent.¹ *See* 20 U.S.C. § 1232g(b)(1). "Education records" means those records that contain information directly related to a student and are maintained by an educational agency or institution or by a person acting for such agency or institution. *Id.* § 1232g(a)(4)(A). This office generally applies the same analysis under section 552.114 and FERPA. Open Records Decision No. 539 (1990).

Information must be withheld from required public disclosure under FERPA only to the extent "reasonable and necessary to avoid personally identifying a particular student." *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 332 (1982), 206 (1978). Additionally, all handwritten documents created by students must be withheld in their entirety. *See* Open Records Decision No. 224 (1979) (student's handwritten comments would make identity of student easily traceable and such comments are therefore excepted by statutory predecessor to section 552.114); *see also* 34 C.F.R. § 99.3 (defining personally identifiable information to include information that would make student's identity easily traceable). Upon review of the submitted information, it appears that due to the content of most of the documents, the identities of students would be easily traceable. Therefore, we conclude that the majority of the submitted information must be withheld under sections 552.026 and 552.114 in conjunction with FERPA, as follows: documents you have marked as AG-6-8, AG-11-27, AG-30-51, and AG-53-61 must be withheld in their entirety. In documents numbered AG-02-05 and AG-09, we have marked the information which must be withheld. The remaining information in these documents must be released. Documents numbered AG-1, AG-3, AG-10, AG-28-29, AG-52, and AG-62 must be released to the requestor in their entirety. As the information you seek to withhold under sections 552.101 and 552.131 may be withheld under sections 552.026 and 552.114, we need not address those exceptions to disclosure.

This letter ruling is limited to the particular records at issue in this request and limited to the facts as presented to us; therefore, this ruling must not be relied upon as a previous determination regarding any other records or any other circumstances.

This ruling triggers important deadlines regarding the rights and responsibilities of the governmental body and of the requestor. For example, governmental bodies are prohibited from asking the attorney general to reconsider this ruling. Gov't Code § 552.301(f). If the governmental body wants to challenge this ruling, the governmental body must appeal by filing suit in Travis County within 30 calendar days. *Id.* § 552.324(b). In order to get the full benefit of such an appeal, the governmental body must file suit within 10 calendar days. *Id.* § 552.353(b)(3), (c). If the governmental body does not appeal this ruling and the governmental body does not comply with it, then both the requestor and the attorney general

¹In Open Records Decision No. 634 (1995), this office concluded that an educational agency or institution may withhold from public disclosure information that is protected by FERPA without the necessity of requesting an attorney general decision.

have the right to file suit against the governmental body to enforce this ruling. *Id.* § 552.321(a).

If this ruling requires the governmental body to release all or part of the requested information, the governmental body is responsible for taking the next step. Based on the statute, the attorney general expects that, within 10 calendar days of this ruling, the governmental body will do one of the following three things: 1) release the public records; 2) notify the requestor of the exact day, time, and place that copies of the records will be provided or that the records can be inspected; or 3) notify the requestor of the governmental body's intent to challenge this letter ruling in court. If the governmental body fails to do one of these three things within 10 calendar days of this ruling, then the requestor should report that failure to the attorney general's Open Government Hotline, toll free, at 877/673-6839. The requestor may also file a complaint with the district or county attorney. *Id.* § 552.3215(e).

If this ruling requires or permits the governmental body to withhold all or some of the requested information, the requestor can appeal that decision by suing the governmental body. *Id.* § 552.321(a); *Texas Department of Public Safety v. Gilbreath*, 842 S.W.2d 408, 411 (Tex. App.--Austin 1992, no writ).

Please remember that under the Act the release of information triggers certain procedures for costs and charges to the requestor. If records are released in compliance with this ruling, be sure that all charges for the information are at or below the legal amounts. Questions or complaints about over-charging must be directed to Hadassah Schloss at the General Services Commission at 512/475-2497.

If the governmental body, the requestor, or any other person has questions or comments about this ruling, they may contact our office. Although there is no statutory deadline for contacting us, the attorney general prefers to receive any comments within 10 calendar days of the date of this ruling.

Sincerely,



Michael A. Pearle
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

MAP/seg

Ref: ID# 144564

Encl. Submitted documents

cc: Mr. Tony Conners
Brim, Arnett & Robinett
2525 Wallingwood Drive, Building 14
Austin, Texas 78746
(w/o enclosures)